



& Workers' Liberty

# Solidarity

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No 470 23 May 2018 50p/£1

# Councils harass the homeless EXPROPRIATE THE LANDOWNERS!

The number of people sleeping rough in the UK is at a record high, after a 73 per cent rise in numbers over the last three years.

According to a snapshot analysis by UK local councils, there were 4,751 people sleeping rough on a given night in the autumn of last year, a 169% increase on 2010 figures. In the course of last year 8,108 slept rough in London, a 121% increase on 2010 figures.

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# Venezuela: workers' Third Camp needed

By Pablo Velasco

**Nicolás Maduro, the successor to Hugo Chávez, won the Venezuelan presidential election on 20 May – a result that offers little for workers in Venezuela or elsewhere in Latin America.**

Maduro received two-thirds (67%) of the vote, defeating rivals Henri Falcón (21%), Javier Bertucci (10%) and Reinaldo Quijada (<1%), with turnout less than 50%.

Maduro rules as a capitalist politician with burgeoning Bonapartist tendencies, presiding over a declining capitalist economy and an increasingly dysfunctional bourgeois state.

Maduro was backed by the Chavista coalition, which included the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV), the Communist Party of Venezuela, the Tupamaro party, Homeland for All (PPT) and others. His campaign slogans were "Together anything is possible" and "Let's Get Going Venezuela".

Falcón is a former Chavista who was the main right-wing opposition candidate in these elections. He joined Chávez's MBR-200 movement, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and the PSUV. Falcón was the Chavista governor of Lara State, before defecting to

the right-wing opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD). Bertucci is a conservative leader of the evangelical movement "The Gospel Changes". He stood on the slogan "Hope for Change" and was backed by leaders of Christian Democratic COPEI party, one of the old ruling parties before Chávez.

Quijada is also a dissident Chavista, who demanded a return to the Chávez's original political direction. He was also previously a member of the MVR and PSUV. He has edited the left-wing news website Aporrea and written for the Chavista Diario Vea national newspaper.

In 2015 Quijada founded the Popular and Political Unity 89 (UPP89) party. His election slogan was "Let's go out and vote for the future of our country". He was supported by Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide), a Chavista kitsch-Trotskyist group. Marea was part of the PSUV from its foundation until last year.

None of the candidates stood for independent working-class politics or made authentic socialist propaganda. Understandably, some socialists and activists in Venezuela called for abstention or boycott of the elections. Those like the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo de Venezuela (LTS) argued that none

of the candidates represented working class interests. Others emphasised the political and legal conditions (weighted towards Maduro), which made such an election illegitimate.

On the international left, the Chavista apologists around Alan Woods (Socialist Appeal in Britain) called for a critical vote for Maduro. Having functioned for years as a mouthpiece for pro-Chávez propaganda, they have become more critical of Maduro's disastrous rule. However they still argue to support him, largely on the grounds of keeping out the right-wing opposition. In the circumstances, given the state of MUD, this seems overblown.

## FUTURE

**More importantly, they put off for the distant future the central task of building an independent working class party in Venezuela that could stand against both the neoliberals and the Chavistas.**

Venezuela is currently mired in a severe economic crisis and contraction. Both Chávez and Maduro responded by printing money to finance the fiscal deficit, but this has led to the drastic devaluation of the currency and hyperinflation. The launch of the Petro crypto-cur-



rency is a desperate gamble to escape the quagmire.

The slump in the global price of oil, Venezuela's main export, is part of the cause. US, British and other economic sanctions also exacerbate the situation. But government failure, as well as corporate corruption and mismanagement have also contributed. Although oil and some other firms are state-owned, most of the means of production remain in private hands. Working class living standards have been hammered, with government subsidies failing to make good the shortfall.

Worse – almost two decades of

Chavismo have decimated the labour movement. In 2003 the UNT emerged as an important trade union centre. Today, although the remnants survive as the UNETE and other independent unions, the Chavista split off to create its own trade union front, the CBST CCP, has divided and weakened workers and effectively prevented a more belligerent fight back.

**Socialists in Venezuela have a massive job putting independent working class politics on the agenda – starting with the creation of their own party.**



## Macron struggle boosts Fête

By Michael Elms

**Over the long Whit weekend of 19-21 May, the French socialist group Lutte Ouvrière holds their annual festival, the Fête de Lutte Ouvrière.**

In the context of the massive strike movement sweeping France as workers and students struggle against President Macron's wide-ranging anti-social reforms, this year the Fête was larger than usual.

Tens of thousands of socialists, workers and students came to

enjoy delicious food (from oysters to snails to West African maafe to Tunisian briki), live music, talks, science exhibitions, a medieval village, climbing walls, fireworks and more over three days.

As we do every year, supporters and friends of Workers' Liberty visited the Fête, and held a stall, selling literature and talking to socialists from all over the world.

**We also held a forum on the historical roots of "left" anti-semitism and the problems it poses for the British left.**

## Grenfell inquiry must expose the truth

By Gemma Short

**The Grenfell Tower Inquiry opened on Monday 21 May with tributes to those who died in the tragedy by their family and friends.**

Families are being given as long as they want to tell the inquiry about those they lost, and many are choosing to use photos and videos as well as words. The first day of the inquiry heard tributes about Logan Gomes, a baby born still-born after the fire, as well as of Khadija Saye and her mother Mary Mendy, Denis Murphy, Joseph Daniels, and Mohamed Neda.

The inquiry, led by controversial retired Judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick, was announced by Theresa May the day after the fire. So far some 267,000 documents have been received and reviewed by the inquiry and 547 people have been given "core participant" status.

But, controversially, some key activists in the Grenfell Action Group, who had campaigned about safety in the block before the fire, have not been made "core participants". Nine expert witnesses have so far been announced, expected to cover issues such as the spread of the fire, the regulation of the building, the fire brigade's role,



and gas and water supplies to the tower. However Moore-Bick and the inquiry have been criticised for not including wider social and political issues, such as race, poverty, and social housing in the remit of the inquiry.

On the same day BBC Panorama aired a programme called "Grenfell: Who is to Blame?" which claimed that the cladding which burned out of control had never passed the required safety tests, and may have been mis-sold by the manufacturer.

It was reported that the manufacturer used extra fire retardant in the product which qualified for a safety certificate, but a more flammable version was then sold for public use.

The company was also apparently warned that its marketing suggested the insulation was suitable for use with other cladding panels and for tower block refurbishments — neither of which was

true. After the fire another review, led by Dame Judith Hackitt, was commissioned by the Home Office, and Department for Communities and Local Government, into building regulations and fire safety. Published on 17 May, the report has angered many as it stopped short of calling for a ban on combustible cladding.

The first anniversary of the fire on 14 June will be marked by a silent march through the local area.

Many of the survivors marching will still be without permanent accommodation 12 months on. 201 of the 210 affected households have accepted offers of temporary or permanent accommodation. The rest remain in emergency accommodation. It is estimated that only a third of those rehoused are in secure, permanent new homes.

**The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is not expected to report its findings until at least October.**

# Celebrating wealth

By Chryssa Reimer-Canellakis

The past week has seen my perfectly reasonable, cool, and otherwise rock 'n' roll friends descend into a royal wedding frenzy not seen since ... well, ever, really.

Somehow, Meghan Markle being divorced, mixed-race and from "a broken home" seems to have made it hip to celebrate this royal wedding in a way that Kate and Wills never was.

The fact that the guest list was studded by showbiz names simply seemed to prove the point. But is there really anything hip about watching a bunch of obscenely rich people all congregating under the same roof? Especially when there are thousands of homeless people sleeping rough, not just on the streets of Windsor, but up and down the country. All of which made me wonder – how many homeless people could be housed with the wealth of some of the wedding guests?

Conveniently, the Sunday Times Rich List 2018 was released the previous weekend, so we've got hot-off-the-press figures. David and Victoria Beckham are now worth £340 million (up from £300m in 2017). This could provide micro-homes for 8,500 homeless people (at a cost of £40,000 per home – see below). Elton John, at £300m (up from £290m in 2017), could pay for another 7,500 homes. George and Amal Clooney, with their £260m, could buy some 6,500 of the single-occupancy homes.

According to official government data, about 4,700 people per night were sleeping rough in England last autumn – a figure that has more than doubled since the Tories came to power in 2010.

But in reality, the true figure of people who are homeless or living in inadequate housing (including those in temporary accommodation, homeless shelters, etc.) is around 300,000 says Shelter, the homeless charity. So you would need to add the net worth of a few extra guests (The Queen? £370m; Oprah Winfrey? US\$ 2.8bn; the Duke of Westminster and the Grosvenor family? £9.9bn; this game could end rather quickly, at this rate).

I am not suggesting that this is how we should solve the homelessness issue, let alone the housing crisis. What we need is justice, not charity.

The cost of £40,000 per micro home is provided by Homeless Foundation, a Worcestershire-based charity, who has designed and piloted the use of the iKozie, a 186 sq ft single person cabin. Of course, what is really needed is large-scale building of social housing provided at truly affordable rates. As well as broader measures to tackle inequality at large.

In the lifetime of Harry and



Meghan Markle's dress cost an estimated £387,000

Meghan inequality in the UK and the US have soared. In 1981, the year that Meghan was born, the top 1% in terms of fiscal income share (i.e. including social security benefits, and income from investments, amongst other sources of non-wage income) captured 9.3% of the total income; by 2014 this figure was 20.4%. It had more than doubled, meaning that the top 1% took home one-fifth of the whole pie.

In the UK, the equivalent was 6.7% in 1981 and 13.9% in 2014 (the last year we have comparable figures for). Whilst the share the 1% takes home is smaller in the UK than in the US, it too has doubled in that period.

**Seen in this light, the monarchy isn't just a relic from the past, but in many ways an accurate representation of a society that thinks extreme wealth and privilege is something we should all celebrate.**

# Lull but no peace

By Colin Foster

A lull in conflict in the Middle East looks likely. But it may be short-lived, or not happen at all. None of the underlying drivers of tension have eased.

On the Gaza-Israel border, Israeli snipers killed 64 people on 14 May. That brings the total killed by snipers over weeks of protests, from which groups mostly of young men sally forth to throw stones and improvised firebombs, to over 110. Thousands have been injured.

The protests were backed by Hamas, the Islamic clerical-fascist group which rules in Gaza, on the slogan of "right of return", which Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh explicated as allowing the Israeli Jews to retain "not an inch" of the land of Palestine, and Hamas claimed 50 of the 64 dead on 14 May as its members.

But the protests came nowhere near even a serious breach of the border. Just one Israeli soldier was slightly hurt over the whole period.

The response by Israel's right-wing Netanyahu government was brutal and murderously disproportionate.

The Egyptian government, which like Israel keeps Gaza under a blockade, has announced that it will open the crossing from Gaza to Egypt until 14 June, the longest it has been open for many years.

Hamas could wind down its action now and let it be understood, perhaps even with some justice, that Egypt's shift is a result of the protests. It has said that it will stage another big protest on 5 June, the anniversary of the Israeli-Arab Six Day War of 1967, but it has held back from tactics such as firing rockets into Israel.

The Israeli press has reported that Hamas has made behind-the-scenes proposals to the Israeli government that it will operate a de facto truce in return for economic concessions from Israel. That may be true.

The Palestinian Authority in the



West Bank called a general strike on Tuesday 15 May to protest against the killings in Gaza, but such a general strike has no impact on the Israeli economy, and street protests were relatively small.

There have been protests inside Israel, notably in Haifa. Nineteen protesters, mostly Israel Arabs, were arrested by Israeli police on 18 May, and one had his knee broken by the cops. A magistrate ordered them released on 21 May.

The Israeli government has been able to rally nationalist opinion by its actions on the Gaza border and its bombing of Iranian bases in Syria, and probably enough so for its immediate political needs. Since March Netanyahu's Likud party has increased its opinion poll rating from 30% or less to 35 to 40%.

## COOPERATION

Turkey's president Erdogan convened an emergency summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a consortium of 57 states with sizeable Muslim populations (though not necessarily majorities), in Istanbul on 18 May.

Its long final statement, though angry in tone, proposed in terms of definite action only diplomatic and economic pressure on countries not to follow the USA in moving their embassies to Jerusalem. Guatemala and Paraguay have already done so in the last week.

The OIC also declared "unwavering commitment to the two-

state solution, which is the only acceptable international solution in the context of self-determination" ([bit.ly/oic-18](http://bit.ly/oic-18)).

My article in *Solidarity* 469 was wrong in its guess about the outcome of Iraq's elections on 12 May. The alliance which did best in the poll was the one headed by Moqtada al-Sadr, who is Shia-Islamist but less closely tied to Iran. The probably lengthy horse-trading to get the next governing coalition in Baghdad is still not immediately likely to be of regional-strategic import.

Iran, though its ruling circles often shout about "death to Israel", signed the OIC two-states statement. For now, Iran wants to explore the possibilities of continuing the 2005 nuclear deal with the EU and other powers despite the USA's withdrawal. Probably in the short term it will not deploy its allies Hamas or (more plausibly) Hezbollah to start a war against Israel.

The EU has updated old legislation designed to safeguard European-based companies breaking the USA's blockade on Cuba in order to keep those possibilities alive, though sober bourgeois commentators mostly reckon that prospects are poor.

All this makes for a lull, but a lull in a situation defined by chronic great-power jostling and the weakness, for now, of grassroots forces committed to fighting for a democratic settlement in the region.

# For a workers' audit!

By Chris Reynolds

Two Parliamentary committees, both headed by right-wing Labour MPs (Frank Field and Rachel Reeves) have called the UK's big four accountancy firms to be referred to competition authorities for potential break-up.

Investigating the collapse of Carillion, which made its bosses millions from taking on outsourced contracts, the MPs found that the firms supposed to audit (check) the firm's figures were a "cosy club incapable of providing the degree of independent challenge needed".

The government, regulators and Carillion board members had often acted "entirely in line with their own personal incentives", and the auditors had provided no check.

Breaking the firms up into smaller similar ones — a recipe also proposed for banks by some politicians after the 2008 credit crash — however, addresses none of the real problems.

After the scandal in 2001, when the giant US energy-trading company Enron collapsed and was found to have cooked up \$100 billion in spurious revenues, the accounting firm which audited it, Arthur Andersen, was broken up.

Bits of it were bought by other big firms. Other bits set up as new firms. Nothing much gained.

We need, instead, workers' audits of these giant profiteers. Trade union representatives, with the aid of a public audit service providing technical expertise but not dependent for revenues on getting the custom of those whom it is supposed to scrutinise, should have access to all the company's books.

**They would surely have stopped the Carillion bosses siphoning off millions by artificially over-reporting revenues, and then slipping away just before the reckoning came.**

# Israel and settler-colonialism

## LETTER

I would like to take up just one issue – “settler colonialism” – in Ashok Kumar’s lightweight and hardly coherent “Response to critics” (*Solidarity* No. 469).

If you criticise Israel as a settler colonialist state (let’s assume you think this position is correct), what exactly are you saying? Does this somehow make Israel uniquely bad? If settler colonialism is to be condemned then what about the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina (probably) and the French in Algeria, up to the war of independence in the 1960s or the polices of the Soviet Union in some of their “Republics” (Kazakhstan for example) which, in essence, were settler colonialist.

All these countries were broadly settler colonial in the sense that Ashok Kumar is talking about and in many of these places the policies of the settlers towards the indigenous people was brutal in the extreme — I understand that on the island of Tasmania for example, the entire indigenous population was slaughtered, every man, woman and child. But does it mean anything concrete to be against settler colonialism?

It existed, yes; it was racist and at times verged on the genocidal, yes — but today we need to concern ourselves with its legacy by, for example, supporting the fight for the rights of the remaining indigenous people



**Israel has existed for 70 years. We have to start from the realities as they exist.**

and certainly part of that fight is understanding what happened in the past, but condemning settler colonialism is a bit like condemning the Dark Ages. It was a brutal period in human history as we all know but

what earthly value is there in denouncing it?

In a general moral sense we condemn all humanities but practically speaking you might as well carry a placard around the streets saying “NO sacking of Rome! Visig-

oths out!” The states I have mentioned are all legitimate entities regardless of their origin and what is the point of criticising their beginnings as settler colonialist states, as if this somehow raises questions about their status today.

No one would think to criticise the legitimacy of Canada, to demand that it shouldn’t exist. Yet Israel seems fair game for this type of invective. Actually Israel isn’t a settler colonial state but I won’t elaborate on this as Sean Matgamna has already replied to this point.

Even if you accept the parameters of this argument, shoddy as they are, it still doesn’t make sense. Israel exists — check it out on a map — and if you don’t like this fact, tough. Whether or not you like the policies of the Israeli government is a different question. As Chernyshevsky once remarked “the truth is concrete”. The alternative is what? To drive the Israelis into the sea (I am sure Ashok Kumar doesn’t agree with this) and if this is your position you’d better have a large, well-equipped army to back it up.

**As good old Labriola once remarked “ideas do not drop out of the sky”, any analysis of present day Israel has to start from the concrete realities on the ground not meaningless — and misapplied — abstractions about settler colonialism.**

John Cunningham

## What happened in the Lewisham East selection

### By a Lewisham East activist

The candidate backed by the Labour right, Janet Daby, has been selected as Labour’s Parliamentary candidate in the ultra-safe Labour seat of Lewisham East.

Daby won with 288 votes, with left candidates Sakina Sheikh and Claudia Webbe getting 134 and 35 votes. The other right-winger shortlisted, Brenda Dacres, dropped out the day before the selection meeting.

Is this a defeat for the Labour left? In a sense, obviously. But let’s unpack it a bit.

There were widespread rumours that the party National Executive Committee would impose an all-left shortlist. Two things seem to have prevented that.

Firstly, the right wing which dominates the local party ran an aggressive campaign, with lots of media coverage, to demand the right of their candidates to be shortlisted.

Secondly, a third left-wing candidate, Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, widely considered to be the frontrunner, dropped out suddenly. In this situation, the NEC panel bottled it.

Should they have gone for an all left shortlist? You can certainly make a case that using the rules for by-elections to shift the overwhelming and unrepresentative right-wing balance of the Parliamentary Labour Party would have been perfectly reasonable.

On the other hand, it did look a bit like using Blairite methods against their opponents (even if those opponents are Blairite hypocrites). In any case, the other part of the plan was an ultra-fast timetable. Originally the party was given only six days from applications and two from shortlisting to select; then another two and half days were added.

The incredibly tight timetable, combined with the right ending up being on the shortlist, made it very hard for the left, because Lewisham East is a heavily right-dominated constituency. (The other two Lewisham par-

ties are run by the left.)

The right has a roughly four fifths majority on the General Committee and has been very effective at keeping down a relatively weak left. Last year Labour First and Progress cited Lewisham East as their model Party. Lewisham East has a relatively small membership compared to neighbouring left stronghold Lewisham Deptford (1,600 as against 3,500); but it may well be that a majority of members here voted for Corbyn in 2016 or joined afterwards to support him. However, the left needed more time to connect with and mobilise those people.

Things were made worse by splits in the Lewisham left. In April Stalinists around Red London, supporters of the Momentum office, and absolute anti-Zionists, drove an attempt to takeover the Lewisham Momentum group. They then walked out and created their own group, so there are now two in Lewisham. That is in itself weakened the left.

### OFFICE

**It is fair to say that most of the Lewisham left backed Sakina Sheikh; others, mainly from the existing group, backed Claudia Webbe for her labour movement record and generally sharper, more political arguments.**

It could have been hard to get unity behind a single candidate anyway, but the split and the lack of time made it much more difficult

In the event, Claudia got a disappointing result.

Momentum office’s ability to mobilise quickly, its and associated social media networks (e.g. people around Novara Media), and the kind of people it can reach, outstripped Claudia’s slower-moving union support and allowed Sakina to get into pole position. Thus the narratives promoted by Sakina’s campaign, for instance obsessive repetition of the importance of her being

“local”, were able to gain grip. It should also be said that she was articulate and her campaign was energetic.

For a mix of reasons, Claudia had very strong support among Lewisham Deptford activists, stronger than in Lewisham East. In East, both the local candidate argument and the argument we can’t afford to lose Claudia from the NEC seemed to have real impact.

In addition to the wider political arguments about the “local”, which definitely need more discussion in Lewisham and generally, there was a question about why Sakina has not been visible or present in Lewisham East’s Labour left. Isn’t it strange not to be active in your Labour Party but then stand to be its MP?

A similar or related issue came up on the morning of the selection, when it emerged (if it’s true Unite leaked it, that’s bad) that she had links to Take Back the City, a London anti-austerity/gentrification campaign which stood a candidate against Labour in East London in the 2016 assembly elections. Disputed details aside, we should of course defend people’s right to change their mind and join Labour, and in fact welcome such things. But shouldn’t you be upfront about your past? Wasn’t failing to disclose this issue a hostage to fortune? And do you need to stand in a parliamentary selection so soon?

Everything described above helped the right and Janet Daby. So, in heavily Remain Lewisham, did the fact she was the most strongly anti-Brexit of the candidates.

This chain of events and outcome are not great for the left, obviously; but things are potentially better than they seem. In any previous selection in Lewisham East, the choice would have been between different shades of right-winger. Moreover one of the left’s most bitter and resourceful enemies, Heidi Alexander, has been replaced by a candidate, Daby, who says that she is on the left, that she voted

for Corbyn twice and that she looks forward to a “radical Labour government” led by him.

The point is not to trust this – in fact it will only benefit the left if we do not trust it. If we organise effectively, we can consolidate the inches we have gained in Lewisham East over the last six months, and gain more. The right has warded off disaster, but it will fall back further.

### UNITY

**This in addition to the fact that the party made a success of having an all women, all BME shortlist, and that Lewisham will now have its first black MP.**

Immediately left activists in Lewisham East need to:

1. Mobilise people for the biggest possible Labour majority in the by-election on 14 June. Come and help!

2. Maintain and developing Lewisham East CLP’s left caucus, Lewisham East Labour Left, which unites supporters of both sides in the Lewisham Momentum split and others, to draw more Corbyn-supporters into activity, recruit more members and push forward a fight to transform the CLP.

The next meeting is on Tuesday 29 May, 7pm, at the Black Cat pub in Catford.

The “Amersham Arms” Momentum group (backed by the office) organised a useful hustings for the Lewisham East candidacy but otherwise has announced no meetings since the 23 April walk out.

**The existing Lewisham-wide group of Momentum supporters continues to meet, plans campaigns on migrant rights and strike support work, and will seek unity in action with all supporters of Momentum in the borough.**

- Originally published by *The Clarion*: [bit.ly/2s1dq3u](http://bit.ly/2s1dq3u)

# Expropriate the landowners!

The number of people sleeping rough in the UK is at a record high, after a 73 per cent rise in numbers over the last three years.

According to the latest snapshot analysis by UK local councils, there were 4,751 people sleeping rough on a given night in the autumn of last year. That represents a 169% increase on 2010 figures. In the course of last year 8,108 slept rough in London, a 121% increase on 2010 figures.

General homelessness has shot up. Just over 59,000 people were accepted as homeless by local councils in England last year. That figure is 19,000 higher than it was 2009-10. The vast bulk of the rise in homelessness is attributable to the sharply rising number of people made homeless by private landlords. Evictions have nearly quadrupled since 2009-10 — from 5,000 in that year to over 18,000 last year.

These evictions are related to cuts in housing benefit. The removal of "automatic" Housing Benefit entitlement for young adults and the full roll out of Universal Credit will make this crisis even worse.

The same local councils who are implementing the cuts in benefit are now expected under the Homeless Reduction Act (2018) to do better at housing homeless people — the victims of their cuts!

The Act asks councils to focus on people most at risk of rough sleeping, to help them to find accommodation. But meagre central government financing of this duty on council (just £72 million a year), makes it unlikely councils will fulfil it.

Most local councils have little housing to offer the homeless apart from temporary accommodation. Placements in temporary accommodation have risen sharply. The overall national total has risen by 8 per cent in the year to 31 March 2017 to reach 78,000 — up by 61 per cent from a low point six years ear-



Last year Oxford city council threatened to fine rough sleepers who left their property in doorways £2,500. This man has received a notice from the council.

lier.

This appalling situation forms a backdrop to the increasingly brutal way that police and council officials, acting under measures put in place by local councils, treat rough sleepers.

Under the 2014 Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, local councils are able to use Public Space Protection Orders to outlaw all kinds of so-called anti-social behaviour in a designated public places. The orders can cover a few streets or a whole city centre. Sometimes the behaviour council seek to outlaw has included begging and rough sleeping (and the drug and alcohol use of rough sleepers).

The Act also allows "authorised people" (including council officers) to issue a Com-

munity Protection Notice to individuals engaged in socialised unreasonable behaviour. Some councils are issuing these notices to people begging, rough sleeping, erecting tents and so on.

People found to be breaching these orders have been fined and imprisoned. The *Guardian* found through freedom of information requests that at

least 51 people have been convicted of breaching a PSPO for begging or loitering and failing to pay a fine since 2014. In some cases the fines have been as high as £1,100. Hundreds of fixed-penalty notices have been issued.

Public Space Protection Orders represent just the latest measure in a raft of laws and policies over the last twenty years used by central and local governments to control public space and to sanitise city centres by driving out "undesirables" — rough sleepers, but also buskers and political activists.

This moves are directly tied to meeting the demands of business and property developers who want to sell an image of the "clean and safe" city.

The bullying and victimising has to stop. A Labour government should repeal all of New Labour's and the Tories' anti-social behaviour legislation.

Underpinning the introduction of soulless "clean safe" cities has been the astronomical rise of land values. Urban residential land values rose by 21% just between 2015 and 2017. They tripled between 2003 and 2015, and increased by a factor of 21 in 1983-2015. Land is £7.3 million per hectare in east London, and £93.3 million per hectare in Westminster. Much of it is owned by a few ultra-rich individuals and institutions.

In the same period most local authorities have sold valuable land to those developers; Labour-controlled authorities justified those sales by the need to maintain services (although that proved impossible). In return developers made minimal promises of building "affordable housing", which turned out to be unaffordable for most, let alone people at the bottom of the housing market.

To help the homeless, Labour urgently needs to take power away from land owners, landlords, and property developers and stop the appalling bullying and victimisation of the homeless.

To do that it could nationalise strategic land in urban areas in order to facilitate council house building and create new open and green spaces. Labour should build thousands more council homes (more than is promised in the Manifesto). The Party should encourage and facilitate councils to take over the empty properties of landlords. It should introduce maximum rents and secure tenancies in all forms of housing and restore and raise housing-related benefits.

**We want to expropriate the landowners and the big private housing landlords. We want to bring all large-scale rented housing under public ownership and democratic control!**

# Organise the anti-Brexit mood of young people

The Chairs of Labour Students and Young Labour, respectively Melantha Chittenden and Miriam Mirwitch, have issued a letter calling for a vote on Brexit policy at the 2018 Labour Party conference.

The response from the Momentum-sponsored left majority on the Young Labour National Committee has been uproar, and an angry statement in response.

Yet Brexit is overwhelmingly unpopular among Labour Party members, and among young people in the UK. Further, according to the National Centre for Social Research, opinion polls have shown that "remain in the EU" has enjoyed a steady lead over "leave the EU" for about a year.

Young people voted overwhelmingly against Brexit, with a 64% turn-out and 70% Remain vote amongst 18-24 year-olds. Polling of Labour Party members finds that over two-thirds are still opposed to Brexit.

And people are right to be sceptical of Brexit. The Leave campaign was fuelled by, and in turn fed, a campaign of corrosive xenophobia and reaction. The referendum was immediately followed by a surge in hate crimes against not only East European migrants but also disabled and LGBT people and people from ethnic minorities.

Undoubtedly the government's "hostile environment" policy, including the harass-

ment and deportation of non-European migrants of the Windrush generation, is being boosted by Brexit's carnival of hate. The Tories have promised that Brexit will entail a "bonfire of the regulations", giving capitalist free rein to exploit, discriminate, sack, pollute, and kill and maim as they please.

So it seems logical that the Labour Party should at least have a discussion about Brexit at its annual conference. And that Young Labour should have a particular interest in that discussion. No?

True, Chittenden, Mirwitch, and the LabourSay.EU campaign that they endorse in the letter are from the party's right, backed by Labour First and Progress, factions which are no consistent friends of migrants. The last time Chittenden and Mirwitch's factional allies held state power, they used it to pursue a demagogically anti-migrant agenda, "triangulating" towards the racist views that paved the way for the 2016 Leave vote.

But the opposition to their call from the Young Labour committee majority is wrong and dishonest.

They say: "Young Labour's national committee wishes to reaffirm its strong opposition to a second referendum on British membership of the European Union." This is not a response to someone calling for a discussion and vote on the matter at party con-

ference.

They go on: "[a]s socialists and democrats, we respect the result of the 2016 referendum. We do not believe that it is the job of Young Labour to ignore and condescend Leave voters and believe that to do so would damage the credibility of the Labour Party in the eyes of the British people". The writers seem to think that democracy is served by a single referendum vote followed by a ban on reconsideration, amendment, or the opportunity for the minority to convince the majority.

## TOP-DOWN

**They're wrong: and this "plebiscitary" vision of democracy owes a lot to both Blairism and the top-down model of organising embraced by the Momentum head office since 2016. Socialists need a fuller vision of democracy.**

Moreover, it is the authors of the response who are condescending to Leave voters: by implying that they are all incapable of changing their minds, of being persuaded. And perhaps it is the role of a left-led Labour Party and a socialist youth movement to change people's minds, to undermine right-wing politics instead of triangulating towards it?

The letter expresses a familiar Blairite theme: smother dissent and discussion in the

party in the name of supporting the leadership at all costs. But that's a disastrous course, and it will undermine, not improve, the prospects of Labour and the socialist left.

The next line in the letter lays the politics of the matter bare: "we fight for a Labour government that can deliver a departure from the European Union which guarantees the greatest benefit for the working class movement and provides the most advantageous way to implement a full socialist programme".

In fact the authors of this letter seem to have signed up to a "Lexit" fantasy: the idea that, instead of being driven by, and driving, a rising tide of bigotry, Brexit can somehow benefit the very workers' movement that it will divide through anti-migrant repression.

But most young people, indeed, most left-wing young people, do not share this cranky, marginal political fantasy. They see very well the damage that Brexit politics and attacks on migrants will do.

The challenge for the socialist left is to give a political leadership to the movement of young people dissatisfied with Brexit.

**We have to displace the Blairites and Liberal Democrats and build an internationalist movement that raises the voice of the working class and migrants, not big business.**

# Lessons from 1974-9 for the next Labour go...

## CHALLENGES OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

**Martin Thomas was an active socialist and trade unionist in 1974, when Britain elected a Labour government seen at the time as left-wing. He spoke to Solidarity.**

**Q. Today people think of the 1945 Labour government as maybe left-wing, but not the Labour government of 1974-9. If we're looking for experiences to learn from for the possibility of a Corbyn government in the next few years, surely that's not one of them?**

A. Denis Healey, the Chancellor in that 1974 government, told the Labour conference in October 1973: "There are going to be howls of anguish from the rich".

He followed up a few days before polling with the promise to "squeeze property speculators until the pips squeak".

The Labour manifesto summed up by proposing "a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families".

Plenty were sceptical about whether Healey and the new prime minister, Harold Wilson, would deliver. Wilson had been a "Bevanite" (the equivalent then of a "Corbynista") in the 1950s, but plenty remembered the dismal record of his 1964-70 Labour administration. The radically sceptical revolutionary left was feistier and more energetic than it is now.

### MILITANCY

**Yet this was a Labour government brought to power on a wave of working-class militancy and radicalisation, a government of a Labour Party which had won an election called by the harassed Tories on the theme "who rules, government or unions?" by siding with the unions.**

The Labour government reflected both the political inadequacies of the labour movement as it was then — and the strength, confidence, and political reach of that movement. That is why we had a sort-of-left government.

The manifesto sided with the miners, whose industrial dispute with the government had spurred it to call the snap election. The Labour government settled the dispute on the miners' terms.

The manifesto promised to repeal Tory laws which forced councils to raise council rents. The Labour government did repeal them. It promised protections for private tenants and the homeless which were delivered.

It promised to and did repeal the law, mild by present standards, which the Tory government had brought in to quell strikes.

The Labour government also introduced the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, and the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Its undelivered promises included a Wealth Tax; sweeping nationalisations — North Sea oil and gas, shipbuilding, ship repair, ports, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, road haulage, construction, and machine tools — and "steps to make the management of existing nationalised industries more responsible to the workers in the industry".

**Q. What did its supporters expect the left government to do?**

A. They certainly expected it to settle with the miners and to reverse the worst measures of the Tory government of 1970-4, which had attempted a Thatcher-type program but soon been thrown off course by militant workers' struggles.

Beyond that, as far as I can make out, everything was vague. The activist left had failed to educate a sufficiently large body of working-class opinion in clear measuring-standards for what a government serving the working class should do.

We had a strong labour movement. Trade-union membership had been growing uninterruptedly since 1934, and would peak at 12 million members in 1979. Shop-steward organisation, previously concentrated in engineering, expanded to many white-collar sections new to trade-unionism. Strikes were on a broadly rising trend from about 1956 through to 1985.

Yet the political culture of the labour movement was decayed. "Socialism", to most people who supported it, meant no more than a hoped-for gradual process of expanding welfare and reining in bosses' abuses. The Communist Party was still influential (20,000 members even in 1979), but it was a demoralised mixture of bewildered Stalinist nostalgics and reformers who were on the way to bland liberalism. The revolutionary left had some influence, but also many vagaries.

In 1978, when this 1974-9 Labour government was visibly reduced to floundering administration of a capitalist system in grievous crisis, the veteran Communist Party cynic Eric Hobsbawm gave a famous lecture entitled "The Forward March of Labour Halted". The leader who took Labour to the right in the late 1980s, Neil Kinnock, would later hail Hobsbawm as his teacher: "the most sagacious Marxist".

You might say that the mass of Labour voters of 1974 believed in a vaguely social-democratic "Forward March of Labour" in history, and expected the Labour government to restart that "forward march".

**Q. What happened?**

A. The Labour government did repeal the most-hated Tory laws. Labour had said that it would restore industrial peace by a "social contract" under which the unions would go slow on militancy in return for the Labour government expanding welfare measures. In fact neither side of that contract held, at least initially. Strikes continued at a high level.

Meanwhile, world capitalism was in its biggest crisis since World War 2. Economic output began to sag in 1973, slumped drastically in 1974, and kept falling until late in 1975. Inflation reached 24.2% per year in 1975. Unemployment rose from 2.6% in 1973 (then considered high) towards 5.7% in 1977.

Both the Labour government, and the broad labour movement, lacked ideas to deal with this crisis.

They were scared. In the first year of the Labour government, some feverishly-extrapolating would-be Marxists (notably the "Mandelite" IMG) speculated that this government would suffer similarly to the Al-



**The Tory government put all industry on a three-day week from 1 January to 7 March 1974, in the run-up to the general election.**

lende reformist government in Chile, which had been overthrown by a very bloody military coup, following CIA-backed destabilisation, in September 1973.

The top layers of the ruling class were less panicky. They were confident that Labour would administer capitalism passably. But in 1974, according to later testimony by Michael Carver, then the Chief of Defence Staff, "fairly senior officers were ill-advised enough to make suggestions that perhaps, if things got terribly bad, the army would have to do something about it..."

### COUP

**By June 1975, Jack Jones, the leftish leader of the strongest union, the TGWU (now part of Unite), was so convinced of the coup danger than he persuaded the government to scrap its manifesto commitment against binding wage controls and introduce a flat-rate limit on pay rises of £6 per week (about £60 in today's values).**

Jones's authority, many workers' bewilderment at the economic chaos, and the fact that for some workers £6 was the biggest weekly pay rise they'd ever had, combined to make this pay limit effective. Strikes declined sharply.

Simultaneously the parliamentary Labour left crumbled in demoralisation when withdrawal from the EU was rejected 67%-33% in

a referendum in June 1975. For the parliamentary left then, EU withdrawal was the politico-economic cure-all.

By 1976-8 the government was imposing heavy cuts on the NHS and other social spending under the terms of a deal it had had to do with the IMF, and opposition from the parliamentary Labour left had collapsed.

**Q. How did the left in the labour movement, outside government, respond?**

A. Most of the revolutionary left had gone along with the parliamentary Labour left in describing EU withdrawal as somehow anti-capitalist, and were equally flummoxed by the referendum result. The forerunners of Workers' Liberty were almost alone on the left in dissenting.

In 1975-6 the mood on the "broad" left could perhaps be described as unhappy but stunned. There were local anti-cuts committees. Industrial struggle revived bit by bit from early 1977, to culminate in large public-sector strikes in the "Winter of Discontent" of 1978-9.

By 1979, frustration had accumulated so that a big left surge developed in the Labour Party, around demands to democratise the party.

But by then workers' confidence in industrial class struggle had already declined. It was not extinguished. The miners would strike for a full year in 1984-5, and at points

# government



## up to the General Election

in that year come close to defeating the Tories. But rank-and-file organisation was already thinner, the will to challenge incumbent union officials already weaker, the cumulative impact of many years of mass unemployment already greater.

The top trade union officials, many of whom went along with the first stages of the Labour left surge, were able to come to an agreement with the Labour leaders to stifle it in 1982. Many leaders of the Labour left took on leading positions in Labour councils, and there, in the battles against Tory cuts, trained themselves in temporising and accommodation.

## Q. What lessons for today?

A. The ideological, political, and economic-class-struggle aspects of the left response, all across the 1970s, were chronically out of kilter with each other. Which is another way of saying that Marxists had been unable to seize the great opportunities given by radicalisations in the late 1960s and early 1970s to build a revolutionary Marxist organisation sufficiently strong to knit struggles together.

If we do not use the "sunny" times — the periods when most things seem to be going the left's way, and so demarcation and education seem like unnecessary bother — then we will not have the means to tackle the "storms" when, suddenly, the difficulties are visibly greater.

# Socialism Makes Sense

## Ideas for Freedom 2018 • 21-24 June

Around the world, socialism is on the agenda.

In the UK, the Labour Party — now the biggest political party in Europe — is led by a self-proclaimed socialist.

In the USA, the movement around Bernie Sanders has made "socialism" the most-searched word in the Merriam-Webster dictionary and inspired a generation of new leftwing activists.

But how can we make the leap from worldwide interest in an idea to making it a reality? Can socialism work, and how can we get there?

A festival of socialist ideas and leftwing discussion, hosted by Workers' Liberty, Ideas for Freedom is an opportunity to explore, through talks, film showings, workshops and debates, ideas about how our world works, and how we can fight for a better one.

### Challenges of a Labour government:

How can we fulfil the radical potential of the "Corbyn surge"? At this year's Ideas for Freedom, a central theme of discussion will be the challenges ahead with a potential left-Labour government: how will capital and the state react to its policies? What can we do to get the labour movement fit to fight? And what is the relationship between electing a Corbyn-led Labour government and the wider socialist transformation of society? Sessions in this stream include:

Reimagining local government with speakers from the Labour left revolt against the "Haringey Development Vehicle", Architects for Social Housing, and Namaa Al Mahdi, Hounslow Momentum • Can Labour stop Brexit? with Michael Chesselum, Another Europe Is Possible, and activists from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement • Fighting the anti-union laws with Gemma Short, Workers' Liberty industrial organiser, and Edd Mustill, co-editor of the *Clarion* magazine • What should Labour do on crime and policing? • Nationalise the banks! • A crisis of care: socialist feminism and the welfare state under the next Labour government with the Workers' Liberty's Lambeth socialist-feminist reading group • The left in government: a panel discussing the experiences of Syriza in Greece, Lula's Workers' Party in Brazil, Mitterrand's government in France, and the Wilson/Callaghan governments in Britain.

Also featuring: "The Corbyn road to socialism? Next steps for Labour" a panel discussion featuring Simon Hannah, author of *A Party With Socialists In It* and co-editor of the *Clarion* magazine; David Osland, Labour left activist and journalist; Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison secretary, and more tbc.

### Global solidarity:

The global fight for women's rights with the South Asia Solidarity Group • Iran: the anti-imperialist myth with film-maker Kaveh Abbasian and Obi Saq • The 2011 uprising in Libya and its aftermath with Clive Bradley, co-writer of a forthcoming TV series on Muammar Qaddafi • The class struggle in China with Demaine Bocock

### Revolutionary history:

Solidarnosc 1981: a revolution against Stalinism • How working class women organise to fight for the vote with Jill Mountford, Workers' Liberty • The Sheffield Workers' Committee with Edd Mustill, co-editor of the *Clarion* magazine • The invention of guns: socialists, militarism, and gun control with Dr. Catherine Fletcher.

### Socialism makes sense:

Neurodiversity under capitalism and under socialism with Janine Booth, author of *Autism Equality in the Workplace*; and Dr. Dinah Murray • What will education look like under socialism? with University and College union activist and education researcher Sol Gamsu, and teacher activists from the National Education Union • The case for Bolshevik organising • Is Venezuela a model? • Why we published *Socialism Makes Sense*, with Sean Matgamna, Workers' Liberty • and more!

### The ABCs of Socialism:

Is socialism incompatible with human nature? • How should revolutionary socialists organise? • Who'll clean the toilets under socialism? • Socialism and democracy • and more!

### Also on over the weekend:

Revolt in the degree factories: building on the UCU strike with UCU activists Rhian Keyse and Jo Grady, and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activist Monty Shield • Left antisemitism: what it is and how to fight it with Daniel Randall, Workers' Liberty, Matt Bolton, author of *Corbynism, a critique of the new British left*, and Hannah Weisfeld • The new New Unionism? a discussion on reviving the trade union movement hosted by the Labour Days podcast, featuring a striker from the East Dulwich Picturehouse cinema strike, and more tba • Animation behind the Iron Curtain • Capitalism is killing us! a discussion on capitalism and health with healthworker activists from the BMA and Unison • The legacy of Stephen Hawking • and more to be announced!

### Thursday 21 June

## Walking with Suffragettes



Meet at 6.30pm at Bow Church DLR, look for the red flag

### Friday 22 June

## Socialism vs. Capitalism

Workers' Liberty debates Dr. Kristian Niemetz of the Institute of Economic Affairs.  
7pm, Institute of Education, WC1H 0AL

**Book your tickets  
online at  
[workersliberty.org/ideas](http://workersliberty.org/ideas)  
Or ring 020 7394 8923  
to pay over the phone**

# The inverted pyramid of fake politics

By Martin Thomas

This is the era of the instant availability online, to many millions, of scientific and critical writings and documentation previously accessible only in a few libraries. It is the era when publicity for protest meetings and demonstrations can quickly get to wider circles online than could be reached by the old methods of hand-to-hand leafletting.

It is also the era of "fake news" swirling round social media, and of "fake politics" in which polemic is conducted not by reasoned argument, or even simulacra of it, but by great inverted pyramids in which broad surfaces of utterly-invented scandal are erected upon the tiniest pinpoints of fact.

Eric Zorn in the *Chicago Tribune* ([bit.ly/e-zorn](http://bit.ly/e-zorn)) reports that around 30 to 40% of registered Republicans in the USA — that is, of supporters of the country's ruling party — still believe that Barack Obama was born outside the USA, and got to be president only thanks to a conspiracy to ignore the US law which says presidents must be born in the country.

49% of Republicans said it was either definitely or probably true that "leaked email from some of Hillary Clinton's campaign staffers contained code words for paedophilia, human trafficking and satanic ritual abuse".

25% across the board, in the USA, said it was definitely or probably true that the September 2001 Islamist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and elsewhere were organised by the US government.

Many people in the USA also believe that Obama is a "communist" (which to them means the same as Stalinist) and a "Muslim" (which to them means much the same as Islamist terrorist).

These fake scandals are built on such pinpoints as that Obama lived in Kenya as a child; that Clinton used a private email server; that Obama wanted some government role in providing health insurance; or that Obama sounds a bit like Osama.

Unscrupulous polemic from press and pulpit has long been an element in right-wing and conservative politics. The "godless communists" would break up your family and corrupt your children. Some things are new.

New is the wrap-around nature of today's fake politics. Yesteryear, you got the fake polemic only from vocally right-wing workmates or neighbours or family members, or when you read the right-wing press or went to church. Most people had some sphere of rational reassurance.

Today, many people check their smartphones 24/7 and face a barrage from social media with no respite even in their most private moments. This may ease with a shift to different social media — teenagers today say "only old people are on Facebook" — but may not.

New is the disinhibiting effect of the internet. The boss of a rapidly-growing firm, Social Chain, whose business is to spread stories on social media, boasts that it "can make any hashtag trend on Twitter before he's finished his presentation" to commercial customers.

Its secret? "People share feelings, not information... The stronger the emotion that a Facebook post, tweet or Instagram story elicits, the further it will be carried by the churning waves of algorithm" ([bit.ly/soc-ch](http://bit.ly/soc-ch)).

In much of social media nothing is audible unless shrieked. On social media, people,



often write anonymously, hype up denunciations and threats and "scandals", or pass them on and amplify them, more recklessly than they would ever do face-to-face.

Most of fake politics is an instrument of the right against the left or even the relatively-liberal centre in politics, as in the USA. Socially, a large part must be driven by the backlash of the old, the disappointed, the bewildered, and the frustrated, against the erratic but real growth of more liberal (small-l) and socially-minded attitudes.

Despite what you might think from US election results, for example, the percentage of people there saying they have "a great deal of confidence" in organised religion has gone down from 34% in 1973 to 19% in 2016, and the percentage stating "hardly any" has gone up from 16% to 26% ([bit.ly/relig-us](http://bit.ly/relig-us)). A majority of young people in the USA now say they prefer socialism to capitalism.

Right-wing backlash fake politics has some effect, though.

Also effective in slowing, neutralising, or diverting the growth of broadly left-wing sentiment is a new rise of fake politics within the left. And conspiracy theories spread on social media, as about 9/11, have a special ability to divert would-be left (or at least anti-establishment) sentiment into right-wing channels. Often the antisemitic right, since centuries of embedded prejudice in Europe connect all mysterious malign secret power to "the Jews", or in modern idiom to "the Zionists".

Especially since the Corbyn surge opened new political space, there has been a backlash from more conservative parts of the left, seeking to marginalise, to diabolise, even to criminalise, those sections of the left urging more radical ideas or more rational debate.

Some of the methods are not new. They are reminiscent, for example, of those used in 2013 in a brief "scandal" to accuse us of being "racist" on the basis of a short passage (a paraphrase of Engels, as it happens) torn out of an old article from 2006. In that case, after the first Facebook fever, some people tried to write reasoned polemics against the 2006 article. They were replied to ([bit.ly/2013row](http://bit.ly/2013row)), and the contrived "scandal" faded.

Reminiscent also of the methods used by the Stalinist movement in its heyday, when they called Trotsky and his co-thinkers "wreckers" and "fascists". Or of the enemies

of the Bolsheviks in 1917, when they called Lenin a "German agent" on the slim basis that he had got permission to travel through German territory by train to get back to Russia.

The Stalinists mounted a show of sustaining an argument for their "Trotsky-fascist" slanders, a fraudulent show but a show, by staging the Moscow Trials. More recent fake polemics against Workers' Liberty rise not even to that level. One of them has been that we are equivocal about or even "defend" child abuse.

In the *Chicago Tribune* article cited above, Zorn reports a poll finding that 45% of all Republicans believed that Hillary Clinton was connected to a child sex ring, or at least they weren't sure about it.

The polemic against us is as fake as the accusation against Clinton. Or even more so: it is conceivable that even someone living as much in the public eye as Clinton could secretly connect to a child sex ring, but what a political organisation says about an issue like child abuse is by definition public.

The anonymous Facebook page "Red London" and anonymous blogs such as [bit.ly/fake-p](http://bit.ly/fake-p) have based themselves on snippets from an article in *Solidarity* of 15 years ago (23 January 2003: [bit.ly/gerry-b](http://bit.ly/gerry-b)) and texts discussed at a conference of ours in March 2003. Unlike pretty much every other organisation on the left, Workers' Liberty makes the texts of our conference public every year — those passed, those defeated, those left on the table.

## RESOLUTION

**The resolution passed at the 2003 conference was:**

1. We recognise that the massively greater social weight of adult vs child / young person means that effective consent is not possible within such inequality. The 'Age of Consent' is a legal device which recognises this inability. 2. Any fixed age of consent is necessarily arbitrary, but 16 (the age of consent in Britain) does coincide with other markers of adulthood and economic independence (age of marriage, school leaving age, full-time employment). 3. We oppose the call for the abolition of the age of consent".

The January 2003 article stated: "Any sexual relationship between an adult and a child is necessarily exploitative, even if there is no physical coercion involved... 'consent' is meaningless in the structurally unequal relationship of adult to child".

A longer article from 2001 makes the same case: [bit.ly/2001-art](http://bit.ly/2001-art). How can even the most unscrupulous and anonymous politics-faker invent a scandal here?

Here's an example of how. In the 2003 article, the writer recalled that in the 1970s quite a few on the left — not the forerunners of Workers' Liberty, but quite a few on the left — opposed the age-of-consent law. Those left-wingers had a semi-anarchist disposition to oppose state regulation of anything, and a extravagant and misplaced conviction that very young people could and should decide freely what was abusive and what was not.

In the course of arguing against those 70s-leftist attitudes, the writer recalled having been told by a comrade about some confer-

ence of lesbian and gay students where "there were active paedophiles accompanied by young children" present. The 2003 article continued: Linda Bellos objected. It is shocking that she was poorly received.

The anonymous politics-faker twists that by somehow finding it "not obvious" whether the conference referred to was a Workers' Liberty one. Of course it wasn't! Yet as the "fake news" was Broken-Telephoned across social media, the claim came to be about some Workers' Liberty conference allegedly frequented by child-abusers.

The pinpoint at the vertex of this inverted pyramid of fake politics is that articles like those of 2003 and 2001 tried to refute the foolish 70s leftist attitudes in rational and careful terms, and criticised the "death to nonces" fever of the right-wing tabloid press like the old *News of the World*.

The main threat to children in the 1970s, after all, was as ever not from foolish leftists but from traditional authoritarian families and from not-at-all-libertarian institutions like the Catholic Church.

Although they are designed to circulate within the left, the bits of fake polemic are set up in traditional conservative mode. They assume a "normal", accepted, acceptable attitude: all that needs to be done to disqualify anyone is to contrive or invent some extract from their ideas which seems to transgress.

They are set up to appeal to and bolster old-fashioned "death to nonces" fever; but also, and simultaneously, to appeal to more modern strands in identity politics.

They appeal to people on the principle that banning should be the reflex response to whatever is objected to, or at least whatever is objected to "on behalf of" a disadvantaged group. Here a sort of "virtual victim" status is adopted by the politics-fakers though they are not children themselves nor claim to speak for any particular child.

A good and progressive development over recent decades has established as orthodoxy the principle that someone seeking investigation of charges of child abuse or sexual abuse should get the investigation in good faith, promptly, and with the assumption that there is something to investigate.

Someone bringing charges of burglary first gets the burglary investigated, and only later and after solid good cause has emerged may face queries as to whether maybe the burglary did not happen or has been exaggerated. The same should hold with abuse charges, and all the more so because bringing those charges is more painful than bringing charges of burglary.

It does not follow at all that the sort of anonymous, unevidenced charges of child abuse put around by Red London should gain credence. Just as, however many Republican supporters allege that Hillary Clinton is tied into a child sex ring, and no matter what socialists have to say against Clinton's politics on a thousand issues, to give credence to that sort of accusation is to degrade, not enhance, social solidarity with victims of abuse.

To dispute and seek to debate our political ideas is entirely in order. Workers' Liberty is and long has been exceptional among left-wing groups in our openness to and keenness for debate, even with those who denounce and contest our ideas most acridly.

**The new fake politics is, however, not political debate. It is the opposite. It is the use of contrived fake scandal to stall and stifle the development of radical and socialist ideas. It is a backlash against the openings created by the Corbyn surge.**

# The myth of the “Testosterone Rex”

By Ruth Willis

**Even before I read Cordelia Fine's 2010 book *Delusions of Gender* I believed gender to be a social construct. But as the parent of children of both sexes I thought I could see differences that meant something more than social contingencies.**

But Fine's book explained and demonstrated how pervasive, subtle and insidious gender conditioning is; and, vitally, how it can be challenged and undermined.

In her latest book, *Testosterone Rex* Fine turns her attention to the question of sex hormones with a focus on the titular beast testosterone.

You know the story? From an evolutionist's viewpoint the males and females of any species develop different behaviours because of their specific role in reproduction. Female human brains are programmed by sex hormones to be nurturing, to seek stability / monogamy, to avoid risks. The male human brain, meanwhile, is dictated to by testosterone, leading to male predilection for multiple sexual partners, higher levels of aggression and risk taking behaviour — the reproductive drive requires males to spread their seed.

We see this story replicated everywhere, in countless books and articles attempting to explain the sexes to each other, working on the assumption of real and hardwired difference driven by sex hormones. It has its mirror in some feminist thought, where a biological essentialism paints males as inherently aggressive. That is also straight from the “Testosterone Rex” myth.

Cordelia Fine takes apart key pieces of historical research on which much of this mythologising about testosterone is based.

She starts by debunking early studies which entrenched evolutionary principles such as “male promiscuity”; demonstrating how previously unrecognised cultural bias led to selective interpretation of data to fit preconceptions about male and female roles.

Angus J Bateman's founding study using fruit flies receives the Fine treatment. Fine argues this study, which claimed to demonstrate that male promiscuity maximised reproductive success, when stripped of bias, actually shows that reproduction is maximised when both males and females have multiple sexual partners.

Such bias is found aplenty in many of the pioneering works on sex difference.

One of the strengths of Fine's book is that she does not say there are no differences between males and females. She concedes that differences exist, but her argument, articulated with clarity and evidence, is that the differences are neither *decisive* nor *solely attributable* to sexual hormones.

Fine argues that behaviours, rather than being hormonally determined, can be shown to be adaptive. Behaviours evolve according to the conditions in which animals find themselves. Within this, testosterone-attributed behaviours can be seen in both males and females to greater and lesser extents depending on social context.

Her point is, “the incredible diversity of sex roles across the animal kingdom: across species, biological sex is determined by gamete size but this, in turn, doesn't determine arrangements for mating or parental care”.

In critically examining key experiments into human male and female sexual behaviour she makes some vital observations relating to both the question of female

promiscuity and sexual pleasure.

A 1989 study entitled ‘Gender differences in receptivity to sexual offers’ involved attractive men and women propositioning people on a college campus. The greater likelihood of men agreeing to go to a woman's apartment to have sex that night is cited as a test of real, testosterone-driven, sex differences in regards to sexual promiscuity.

But as Fine points out, what the study actually shows is women's disinclination to be raped or murdered by heading off to the home of a complete stranger. There is also the social consequence of slut shaming for promiscuous women. Finally, while a one night stand may guarantee an orgasm for a man, women often find themselves left wanting.

As Fine observes “some of the gap between the sexes’ enthusiasm for casual sex might close if the event left men sexually frustrated the majority of the time, but women almost invariably enjoyed full sexual relief”. Fine lays bare the clumsy gendered bias in the construction of many of the key studies into human sexual behaviour.

## RISK

**Fine also throws a light on the differences in risk taking behaviour between males and females. Another thing put down to “Testosterone Rex”.**

She illustrates that whether a risky behaviour will be undertaken, or even if a said behaviour is perceived as risky by an individual, depends greatly on how safe and secure that individual fundamentally feels socially.

Analysis of statistics about people more or less likely to take risks shows not just a sex or gender disparity but a race and class one; the group most likely to take risks are rich, white, conservative-minded, males. This risk-taking isn't a result of sex hormones but wealth, power and privilege.

Our sexual and social behaviours and choices are revealed by Fine to be a result of a rich web of factors in our cultural and biological make up; and while there may be marked sex differences in the brain, these by no means have a marked effect on behaviour.



Fine makes a brief but important mention of the fact that biological sex differences are not as binary as society would have us believe and that sex development is a complex interaction of factors across the genome. This has some relevance to the on-going discussion on the left about transgender. While supporting the view that sex differences are not binary or just related to external genitalia, the book also supports the view that gender is a construct and not something innate.

The book doesn't make a special case for humans breaking the evolutionary mould of hormone driven sexual behaviours. Fine illustrates the huge variety of sexual behaviour right across the animal kingdom and how those behaviours are mutable. However, Fine does identify the unique way in which human beings are able to adapt to environment and the infinite complexities and myriad of ways in which our personalities and behaviours present.

The reason for human adaptability she explains, with the warm wit that flows through the book, that there are a million ways to be a woman, “but there just aren't that many ways to be a female baboon”.

It is the human capacity to adapt and consciously change and mould ourselves and our environment that bring the hope in this book. In the last section, looking towards the future, Fine examines the ways that strong adaptive behaviours in animals can change if different environments are selected, illustrating the potential for human beings to revolutionise our own developmental systems. In a discussion about gender stereotyping, children's toys, and development of gender identification, Cordelia Fine argues that while it isn't easy we should look to a transformation which “involves the reconstruction of the social structures, values, norms, expectations, schemas, and beliefs that penetrate our minds, interactions and institutions”. No small task!

This book should give socialists reason to be optimistic as it is an affirmation of socialist feminist theories about the artificial nature of gender and sexual constructions and the intricate relationship to societal structure and power relations, both social and economic.

**Most, importantly it shows how these are things we can change.**

## 120 bpm: a window into the AIDS crisis

Simon Nelson reviews 120 bpm

**Based on some of the direct experience of its director Robin Campillo, 120 bpm is an affecting drama about ACT UP Paris.**

ACT UP was formed in 1987 in New York but chapters spread across the US and Europe based on a militant, direct action approach to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. At the centre of this film is the relationship between two members — Sean, a founder member, HIV+, angry and militant and the new recruit Nathan, quieter, HIV- and new to the activist world.

We see the Parisian group protest against Mitterrand's government's laissez-faire attitude to sex education and its role in a contaminated blood scandal, and against those pharmaceutical companies who fail to release their research or do enough to ensure that new and pioneering drugs are available.

The group are always at pains to state that

those who are going to suffer from the ignorance and silence of the government and big pharma are the “gays, the junkies, the immigrants, prisoners and prostitutes.”

Much of the film revolves around the weekly meetings of the group, held in a lecture theatre in Paris. Anyone involved in activism will recognise the dynamics at play in these scenes. Thibault, the chair of the group, is regularly accused of being a conservative influence, of holding people back from more militant action. Meanwhile other activists fall out, attack each other in bulletins or argue about what went wrong at a particular protest.

With a penchant for smearing, throwing and drenching people and buildings in fake blood, you see the realities of the kind of action that ACT UP pursued to fight the AIDS crisis.

When one activist dies, the group march, holding aloft their dead comrade's picture, putting the blame on the government for the



lack of action. The invasion of a local school which has refused to install a condom machine, with members providing guerrilla sex education and handing out literature to the students, is met with support from some teachers while others and their students are virulently hostile.

**One student informs the activists she won't get AIDS because she is not a “faggot.” It is one of the few moments of visceral homophobia in the film, most of which is reflected in the attitudes of those whom ACT UP are trying to fight.**

# Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

**In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



## Events

### Monday 28 May

The future of work and the new unionists?  
7pm, Harrie Massey Lecture Theatre, 25 Gordon Street, London WC1H 0AY  
[bit.ly/2K28q5j](http://bit.ly/2K28q5j)

### Tuesday 29 May

NHS Activists Meeting 2  
6:30pm, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, London, WC1X 8TN  
[bit.ly/2x4gSiP](http://bit.ly/2x4gSiP)

### Saturday 2 June

London Momentum meet-up  
3pm, Nunn Hall, UCL, Institute of Education, London, 20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/2kdYYkr](http://bit.ly/2kdYYkr)

Have an event you want listing?  
Email: [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

### Saturday 2 June

London Radical Bookfair  
12pm, Goldsmiths University of London, Lewisham Way, London, SE14 6NW  
[bit.ly/2IAYSSC](http://bit.ly/2IAYSSC)

### 8 -10 June

We Are The University — National Student Left Conference  
Sheffield Students' Union, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TG  
[bit.ly/2rVmxt5](http://bit.ly/2rVmxt5)

### Saturday 9 June

Kurdish Solidarity Campaign AGM  
11:30am, Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London, N4 1 HU  
[bit.ly/2GFceHQ](http://bit.ly/2GFceHQ)

# Reinstate Fred Leplat!

## LABOUR

By Sacha Ismail

Barnet Momentum chair Fred Leplat has been expelled from the Labour Party or rather had his "membership terminated" — for a typically garbled and unjustifiable mix of "reasons".

Fred came to the attention of the bureaucracy because he coordinated a letter signed by a range of Barnet members on Israel-Palestine and antisemitism.

The context is widespread speculation that Labour failed to win the council elections in the borough due to antisemitism.

No Workers' Liberty member signed the letter. We wouldn't have, given our disagreements with its political line. However, it

was far from some of the worst "anti-Zionist" politics that exist on the Labour and broader left, let alone antisemitism. As socialist blogger Andrew Coates (whose position is closer to ours) has commented, "there is room in a democratic socialist party for disagreement within these boundaries".

But then Fred was excluded without prior charges or hearing. According to the communications he received, that was because i) he is a supporter of the Socialist Resistance group and ii) he was previously a member of Left Unity (even though he resigned from LU before joining Labour).

The rule cited again him because of his involvement in Socialist Resistance, 2.I.4.b, is the same rule used to expel a number of Workers' Liberty supporters from the party.



It is an outrage against democracy which should be scrapped. A rule change is going to Labour Party conference this September, submitted by five CLPs, to do just that. (See [bit.ly/2IA7VDr](http://bit.ly/2IA7VDr))

On Left Unity, it is the same old issue again: join Labour from a right-wing party and there is no problem. But join from another left-wing organisation and you better watch your back.

**Reinstate Fred! For a democratic, politically pluralist Labour Party!**

## Democracy and the "democracy review"

By Will Sefton

The Labour Party Democracy Review is now in its third and final period, inviting submissions on the following issues: "Electing our Leadership, How we Make Policy and The Way We Work."

It still remains unclear how the findings of the review will be presented and what the status is of the various rule change motions remitted last year on the advice of the National Executive, or when they will be considered.

Meanwhile Momentum is carrying out a consultation of its membership on which proposals it will forward. They have asked its members to answer "Yes" or "No" to 13 questions. Longer policy proposals the questions are based on are also available for members to read. Almost all the questions are uncontroversial as the average score of over 90% for each one demonstrates.

But voting yes or no on whether disabled people should be represented on the NEC or whether the party should have an "institution that allows representatives of mem-

bers and trades unions to help develop party policy on a rolling basis?" is not clear-cut.

Conference should be the sovereign decision-making body of the Labour Party. Reform of the existing and deliberately undemocratic National Policy Forum is not a substitute for this.

CLPD also has a set of proposals it is recommending to member — to be put forward by individuals or through local Labour Parties.

On electing the leadership, like Momentum they favour reducing the threshold needed for nominations for electing a leader where there is a vacancy. They also say that MPs and elected representatives should have no more sway than ordinary members or the affiliated unions. CLPD continue to support the Party having registered supporters, a scheme started under Tony Blair to try and weaken the influence of the electoral college but since abolished by the Collins review.

While the most prominent advocates of abolishing the scheme are those in Labour First, they are not wrong. They see it as a way to stop the groundswell of support Corbyn received in the two leadership elections.

The category is bad because it was an attempt to further atomise the membership and replace collective decision making and organising with passive polling.

CLPD proposes a good policy for the replacement of the Local Campaigning Forums with Local Government Committees. LGCs would provide much more control for members over the actions of Labour council groups.

**They will provide the kind of scrutiny and ability to influence policy that has been so lacking and meant that many Labour Councils run almost completely at odds with local members.**

## Ken Livingstone: good riddance

By Colin Foster

Ken Livingstone resigned from the Labour Party on 21 May. Good riddance!

He ceased to be a real left-winger decades ago, he has a clear record of high-profile antisemitic comments, and he has been aggressively persistent about them.

Yet the Labour Party is still blundering along without any open and thorough discussion of antisemitism. There are still people on the left who see nothing wrong in what Livingstone has said. Suspensions, expulsions, resignations will resolve little until we have that discussion.

In April 2016 Livingstone chose to offer comment to BBC London on Labour's suspension of Naz Shah, who had suggested on Facebook that Israel should be moved to the USA. Shah apologised and was reinstated.

As if it cast light on the acceptability of the notion that a whole nation should be deported, Livingstone retorted that "Hitler supported Zionism". He stuck to that theme, and supporters said he was

merely giving "historical fact" ([bit.ly/kl-16](http://bit.ly/kl-16)).

This was the old Stalinist "Zionist = Nazi" stuff, with the implication that suggesting "the Zionists" be deported as a whole nation is just anti-Nazism. The historical fact — that some Zionists traded breaches in the boycott of Nazi Germany sought by other Zionists for Germany allowing some Jews to leave Germany with some of their property — is very different.

Livingstone was a leftist in the 1970s. But in the early 1980s, as GLC leader, he started working with the WRP, an organisation which had a Trotskyist past but by then was in the pay of the Iraqi and Libyan dictatorships, and antisemitic in consequence.

He soon proclaimed himself an advocate of "cynical soft-sell" politics. The occasional left gestures became rarer as his political career continued through to his defeat as London Mayor in 2008, but his attachment to the legacy of the WRP (which had collapsed in 1985) remained, and the antisemitism continued ([bit.ly/kl-06](http://bit.ly/kl-06)).

**The revived Labour left needs cleaner legacies and traditions.**

# All eyes on TGIs

By Gemma Short

Workers at TGI Fridays restaurants in Covent Garden, London, and Milton Keynes struck on Friday 18 May in the first of a series of Friday strikes over a new tips policy which would see workers losing up to £250 a month.

Workers at TGI Fridays in the Trafford Centre, Manchester and Haymarket Piccadilly, London, have also now voted 100% in favour of strikes and are expected to join the strikes on Friday 25 May. Results of ballots at other restaurants in Enfield, and Gateshead Metro, Newcastle, are expected soon. All six sites may be on strike by Friday 1 June.

Boni, a striker from the Milton Keynes restaurant, said to *Solidarity*: "TGI Fridays has decided to take 40% of our credit card tips and give them to the kitchen of back of house team. We feel that this is instead of giving the kitchen an actual pay rise. We work hard for our tips, and we would prefer that the



kitchen get a secure and solid pay rise so that they don't have to rely on us for money."

Covent Garden worker Beattie explained: "the chefs were always paid substantially more than us, there was a pay differential. As our minimum wage has gone up, TGI Fridays hasn't mentioned that difference. They have a retention problem in the kitchen, and they've decided to fund a 'pay rise' for the

kitchen by taking card tips away from me."

**Workers will strike every Friday over the summer.**

- More information on the Fair Hospitality campaign: [www.fairhospitality.org](http://www.fairhospitality.org)
- Follow Unite's Restaurant and Bar Workers' workers branch on Twitter at: @RwUnite and using #AllEyesOnTGIs

# Picturehouse workers strike again

By a Picturehouse worker

Picturehouse workers will be on strike again for the Sundance film festival happening at Picturehouse Central from 31 May to 3 June.

They will be striking during the opening night on Thursday 31 May, and again on Saturday 2 May. The strikes will hit several premières taking place at the festival.

Behind the scenes at several workplaces, despite no strikes for a while, tensions have been running high. Many of the striking sites are being deliberately understaffed. The company is refusing to hire new staff either due to fears new staff will simply join the union Bectu, or as a way to punish and overwork current employees. It has been causing considerable distress. This has led to some workers having panic attacks, and long term members of staff leaving the company. Sorting out the understaffing has now been included as a new strike demand. Dangerous understaffing in case of fire has been made as an complaint to ACAS as well. However these formal com-



plaints take time and in the meantime it is workers who are suffering.

Workers will hold picket lines from 17:30-20:30 each night, and welcome supporters to join them.

On the Monday 28 May, as a precursor to the strike, the Picturehouse Bectu branches are organising a speaker and Q&A event — "The future of work & the new unionists?".

**Speakers include:** Kelly Rogers, Workers' Liberty activist

and a sacked Picturehouse rep; Lewis Baker, #Mcstriker & Bakers Union activist; Danny Millum, IWGB University of London Branch Secretary; Dr Nick Srnicek, co-author of *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism & a world without work*; and Simon Hannah "Brixton Boycotts the Ritzy" campaigner and author of *A Party with Socialists in It*.

- Buy tickets at: [bit.ly/2ICdyRC](http://bit.ly/2ICdyRC)

# Bring outsourced University of London workers back in house

By Gemma Short

Over 100 cleaners, porters, receptionists and other outsourced workers at the University of London will strike on 6 June.

Workers organised by the IWGB union previously struck on 25-26 April in a campaign to be brought back in-house and have parity of terms and conditions with in-house workers. Outsourced workers currently receive inferior pensions, and less holiday, sick, maternity

and paternity pay.

Protests in support of the strikes on 25 April were attended by hundreds of supporters, including Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell.

A series of strikes and protests has already forced the university to

# Tube drivers plan strikes

By Ollie Moore

Tube drivers at several London Underground depots will strike on 6 and 14 June.

RMT and Aslef members on the Jubilee Line will strike to demand improved work/life balance, as a proposed new timetable threatens to increase weekend working.

Aslef members at the District Line's Acton depot will strike again on the same dates, following an action on 13 April, over abuse of disciplinary procedures. April's strike had a significant impact on the service, with RMT members refusing to cross Aslef's picket lines.

RMT has also declared a dispute with the train side management on the Piccadilly Line, where a ballot for strikes is expected soon.

On the Bakerloo Line, RMT called off a planned strike ballot of its driver members after an unfairly sacked colleague was reinstated.

Elsewhere on London Underground, RMT is launching a new campaign to organise Night Tube station workers.

**The company agreed to a review of the round-the-clock service which runs on certain lines on Friday and Saturday nights, including a look at the staffing levels.**

# Tesco workers demand 15%, bosses offer 3%.

By Ollie Moore

Warehouse and office workers at Tesco's distribution centre in Dagenham, east London, struck for 24 hours from 17-18 May.

The workers, who are members of the Usdaw union, are demanding a 15% pay increase. Tesco bosses have offered 3%. The workers' claim would equate to a £1.39/hour increase.

The logistics sector is strategically crucial to the capitalist economy, but unions, where they have

members, have tended to be conservative.

The Dagenham centre employs around 1,000 workers. A significant number of the workers are Eastern European migrants.

**Strikers organised a relatively large picket line presence of around 80.**

**For a longer report, giving in-depth background to the dispute and the workplace, see the Notes from Below website: [notesfrombelow.org](http://notesfrombelow.org)**

# Traffic wardens strike

By Charlotte Zalens

Traffic wardens in Hackney struck for 48 hours from Monday 14 May in a dispute over pay.

The traffic wardens, employed by APOCA Parking, are organised by Unite, which has put in a claim for a cost of living pay increase of five percent. Workers are also

fighting back against unfair implementation of sickness procedures, and unfair and potentially discriminatory implementation of the annual holiday allocation.

**Unite is also arguing for APOCA to agree to yearly pay negotiations, as happen in local government, with the aim of accounting for cost of living increases every year.**

strike:

[iwgb-universityoflondon.org](http://iwgb-universityoflondon.org)

- Join the protest in support of the strike, 6 June, 5.30pm, University of London Senate House, WC1E 7HU

- Find out more and support the



# Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 470 23 May 2018

50p/£1

## Renationalise the railways!



### By Keith Road

**Virgin Trains East Coast, the consortium that runs the line from London to Edinburgh and which is 90% owned by Stagecoach has had its franchise taken away.**

The line is now temporarily in public ownership, renamed the London North East Railway.

This follows the consortium admitting that they had over-bid for the contract — offering £3.3 billion in order to land the contract, when they had no intention of paying this amount, or as they put it, they "discovered" they were unable to pay the amount.

The Transport Secretary Chris Grayling had previously discussed ending the contract early and allowing a new franchise to take

over. But the collapse of the contract has meant the government has been forced to renationalise. The government intends to offer the franchise out to tender in 2020 and has already given Virgin Trains an extension on the West Coast franchise. The Tories may have accepted this particular private-market failure. They are determined to keep the rail network in private hands.

There are now 17 Train Operating Company franchises operating on the British rail network, and all of them failing in some way. Failing on the basis of private ownership, i.e. not making the expected profits for their shareholders. Or failing passengers through delays, cancellations and overcrowded trains. Or failing rail workers by pushing forward with Driver Only Operation (DOO) and attacking

pay, terms and conditions.

On Monday 21 May Arriva and Goria introduced new timetables across their networks, revealing a lack of planning and staffing. There was severe disruption, with cancellations and widespread confusion.

Both companies have been at the forefront of trying to introduce DOO and have faced repeated strikes from the RMT union and previously Aslef, the drivers' union, to stop its introduction.

### LABOUR

**Labour have committed to halting DOO, and that would be a step forward, though it should be remembered that guards have already been removed from large sections of the rail network.**

The rail network is a vital and socially-useful infrastructure, but is run by privateers more interested in profits than running an efficient and well-run service. Nationalisation of the entire network is an increasingly popular demand, with polls showing around 75% of the public supporting it.

Every year on 2 January, the day on which rail fares increased, there is a campaign day supported by Aslef, TSSA and the RMT. But beyond this day there is very little public activity taking up the demand. The main activity in support of railworkers is done by groups like Disabled People Against Cuts, who have joined picket lines and taken part in direct-action against DOO.

Labour 2017 manifesto called for the renationalisation of the rail-

ways but only when each franchise expires. In the case of the Caledonian Sleeper service this would mean waiting till 2030!

The fight for renationalisation must start now if we are to win it from a Labour government. Rail unions, passenger groups and other activists need to fight now for a wholly publicly-run railway system including maintenance, rolling stock, infrastructure and sales.

Beyond this we need a more radical demand for all the railway companies to be nationalised at the same time and as a whole, and put under rail workers' control.

**A renationalised railway should include representation for passengers and activist groups who support a more efficient, well-staffed and accessible rail network.**

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## Contact us

020 7394 8923

 [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

Write to us: The editor  
(Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

Solidarity editorial: Michael Elms, Simon Nelson, Cathy Nugent (editor), Gemma Short, and Martin Thomas

Printed by Trinity Mirror